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ABSTRACT

This article grew out of a roundtable of national leaders in higher education which explored the role of the academic department in serving as both a force for institutional change and a link to the scholarly world of disciplinary knowledge and practice. The essay argues that the principal threat to the academy is its own fragmentation, with faculty becoming detached from their institutions. With this fracturing of the academic community has come increased individualization and privatization of academic work. In contrast, the essay reports results of interviews with individual faculty and department chairs concerning attributes of effective academic departments such as a supportive culture, frequent interaction among department members, toleration of differences, and generational equity. A definition of an effective department is offered stressing the department as a team of scholars whose primary responsibility is teaching and learning. Renewal of undergraduate education is seen as depending on institutions and departments making such changes as: (1) fostering a greater commitment to teamwork; (2) making effective teaching a subject of collective dialogue and inquiry; (3) making a greater commitment to quality control; and (4) ensuring the presence of a strong and decisive department chair. Brief checklists for change are addressed to: presidents, provosts, and deans; department chairs; and individual faculty. (DB)

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PERSPECTIVES

The Pew Higher Education Roundtable
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They were in a mood to lecture, these senior business majors suddenly enjoying the pleasures of a captive audience. Asked by their administrative hosts what might be done to improve the quality of instruction, the students were quick with their answer: a fundamental change in the reward system. Too little weight was accorded to teaching performance when tenure was granted, salary raises approved, or department chairs chosen. There were simply not enough *rewards* for good teaching.

"And how would you deal with those professors who weren't good teachers?" one of the administrators finally asked. Reflecting afterwards on the odd silence his question had occasioned, he suggested to one of his decanal colleagues that the students, after all, had been well steeped in the ways of the academy—they had little stomach for acknowledging let alone cataloging differences in faculty performance.

"Maybe," the dean laughed. "But you know, your question to them wasn't quite right. While we don't know what to do with individual faculty who disappoint, there isn't a dean worth her salt who doesn't know how to put a recalcitrant department in the deep freeze—reduce its resources, faculty lines, space, renovation—oh, there are any number of ways to thwart its ambitions. Faculty members may find their greatest rewards elsewhere; *departments* can only be rewarded by the institution itself."

An Improbable Agent

It is crunch time for higher education—an age of revenue diets, legislators bent on micromanagement, regulators demanding greater institutional accountability, and consumers insisting on more service at lower prices. It is no longer a question of whether institutions must change but of who will control that recasting—the nation's colleges and universities, or an increasingly competitive market for postsecondary education that holds little sympathy for institutional tradition.

This *Policy Perspectives* explores the potential of the academic department to play the key role in that reshaping. The essay grows out of a special roundtable convened by the Pew Higher Education Roundtable in conjunction with the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) to consider how to preserve what is most important to the academy while enhancing its ability to serve more effectively the changing needs of students and society. For several years, AAHE and Pew Roundtable publications have argued that the academic department, as a "producer's cooperative," ought to take

It is crunch time for higher education—an age of revenue diets, legislators bent on micromanagement, regulators demanding greater institutional accountability, and consumers insisting on more service at lower prices.

broad responsibility for the quality of services it provides. A department should be held accountable for the quality of teaching its members deliver, for the coherence of its major, for its contributions to the general education curriculum, and for the supervision and rewarding of its individual faculty members. This essay extends these concepts by sketching contours of the department as it could become: the principal agent for the purposeful recasting of American higher education.

Departments have been portrayed as clans of arrogant experts, accountable first to their own agendas, second to their discipline, and third—largely as afterthought—to the institutions that house them.

We understand that in proposing this role for the academic department, we fuel the skepticism of those who think the department epitomizes everything that is wrong with higher education—content to be the agent of the discipline and to draw faculty concerns away from their home institutions. Reformers have cast departments as professional guilds seeking to sustain individual privilege at the expense of initiatives designed to enhance teaching and learning. In their most extreme caricature, departments have been portrayed as clans of arrogant experts, accountable first to their own agendas, second to their discipline, and third—largely as afterthought—to the institutions that house them. In the eyes of their harshest critics, departments are sufficiently corrupt that nothing short of their spontaneous combustion will bring about reform.

We argue from a different perspective—one that holds that the principal threat to the academy is its own fragmentation. Earlier Pew Roundtables have focused on the workings of the "academic ratchet" and "administrative lattice" to explain higher education's rising costs and the process by which faculty become detached from their appointing institutions. This essay extends that analysis and argues that with this fracturing of the academic community has come the increasing privatization of academic work and the sense that what faculty do, they do largely on their own.

Such privatization has occurred in proportion as both institutions and their faculty have pursued "reputation," often at the expense of student learning. In the quest for better standing, institutions of all kinds have contorted themselves toward a single mold of achievement and distinction, however great the disparity between those aspirations and the resources available or the needs of students enrolled. Ernest Boyer, in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, documented just how often faculty who would like to devote more energy to teaching are afraid that doing so will jeopardize their careers. It is not uncommon for institutions in search of improved ranking to bestow their greatest rewards on faculty with the least loyalty to the institution per se. Individual faculty in such settings are keenly aware that the real—or at least the most tangible—rewards stem from achievement outside of the institution and its classrooms.

Not surprisingly, then, many institutions and their departments consist of faculty who have distanced themselves from the lives of their academic communities, coming to define their interests in increasingly narrow terms. Although recent changes in federal funding patterns have required research partnerships in the physical sciences and engineering, there is in most other disciplines a diminished sense of shared effort, along with a tendency of individual faculty members to think of their work in proprietary terms—as "my research," "my majors," and, above all, "my courses." As individual courses come to reflect the increasingly specialized views of their faculty-owners, the curriculum begins to lose focus, making sense only as the sum of individual endeavors.

Pursuing one's own work is tantamount to keeping one's bags packed while building the kind of distinctive portfolios that win junior faculty a permanent place in the profession and senior faculty the independence they prize.

There have been good reasons for faculty to thus individualize their principal scholarly investments. One's own work is portable and not dependent on a given institutional setting; it can be developed, laid aside, or adapted as needed in conjunction with other professional activities or opportunities. Pursuing one's own work is tantamount to keeping one's bags packed while building the kind of distinctive portfolios that win junior faculty a permanent place in the profession and senior faculty the independence they prize.

No less than the faculty who constitute its membership, the academic department has been shaped by the privatization of academic work. While many faculty may lament the absence of a strong sense of community within their campus or department, in practical terms most regard their institution as simply a place to pursue their individual interests. What is lost in this ethos is a sense of unity that results from a department's members subscribing to a common purpose and set of goals—to a shared vision of student learning and a set of collective strategies for bringing it about. In earlier times it may have mattered less whether a department operated as a producer's cooperative or as a holding company for faculty entrepreneurs. But we have found—among participants in nearly 100 Pew Campus Roundtables of the past three years—a widely shared sense that the changes in finances, in students, in knowledge, and in the nation's educational needs all call upon institutions and their faculty to work in more concerted ways than most currently do. Both faculty and administrators in these Roundtables have voiced concerns that the instances of departments operating as a collective whole have grown fewer than in the past. Even as parents, legislators, and public supporters of higher education exert pressure for increased accountability, most incentives within the academy draw departments and their faculty further away from the pursuit of shared objectives. Our concern is that the resulting fragmentation reduces the ability of institutions to meet the challenges they face in educating a more diverse and demanding generation of students.

Portrait

A telling portrait of the academic department today derives from the work of Bill Massy and his colleagues at the Stanford Institute for Higher Education Research (SIHER). Based on interviews with individual faculty and department chairs at some 20 colleges and universities, the SIHER research underscores the fact that departments that support undergraduate teaching are those in which members work together in collegial ways. The interviews identified several attributes of departments that function effectively. These qualities included:

- **a supportive culture**, in which members of a department speak openly about teaching and support one another's efforts to improve;
- **frequent interaction**, both formal and informal, among department members on matters of curriculum, students' needs, and on matters of shared interest and concern;
- **toleration of differences**, and a recognition that, while department members may disagree on particular matters, these differences do not impede their ability to work together as professionals or reach common decisions;
- **generational equity**, characterized by the conviction that all faculty, regardless of rank, have an important voice in departmental decisions;
- **workload equity**—the understanding that all faculty share in the fulfillment of the department's responsibilities to the institution and its students, and that individual teaching assignments must take into account the current responsibilities of both junior and senior faculty;
- **evaluation of teaching**—a willingness to take seriously the evaluations both of students and of faculty peers in gauging the success of teaching within the department;
- **balanced incentives** for department members to excel not just in research but in teaching;
- **effective department chairs**, who can personify and guide a department in fulfillment of its goals.

The membership of such departments demonstrated an ability to work collegially, both in formal matters such as deciding promotion and tenure, and

determining course offerings and teaching assignments—and informally, by such means as the sharing of research findings. These departments were defined by a community of interests even though their members were characterized by a diversity in age, outlook, gender, and ethnic background.

The SIHER study found examples of such departments across the spectrum of institutions. These departments attest to the power of a group of faculty that sees itself as a collective whole—a team, really, whose members talk openly about their different strengths and weaknesses as they go about the business of allocating the energies and efforts of the different players.

What is lost in this ethos is a sense of unity that results from a department's members subscribing to a common purpose and set of goals—to a shared vision of student learning and a set of collective strategies for bringing it about.

On both larger and smaller campuses, however, most departments in the SIHER study appeared as something less than whole in their internal workings. While there was a sense among their membership of subscribing to common values and traditions, the homage paid them was often perfunctory, even hypocritical. Constrained resources, generational splits, salary differentials, and the disparity in rewards between teaching and research had left many of the faculty dissatisfied and isolated. These were departments of individuals yoked together largely out of convenience—to share the secretarial support too meagerly supplied, to provide a common address to which student papers and mail might be delivered. Members of such departments avoided meetings, preferring to let the chair resolve class and scheduling conflicts by individual negotiation rather than by collective discussion. Department members made little effort to know how or even what their colleagues taught, as long as the delivery of instruction was not so bad as to provoke a student revolt.

In these settings research, like teaching, was largely a private matter. While in most cases the department remained coterminous with a discipline, its faculty were left to their own devices, though increasingly in partnership with distant collaborators, to define and pursue their own niche. Only the junior faculty, still having to prove themselves, sensed their freedom was in any way constrained by department reviews or other forms of collective judgment. All that brought these departments and their members "home" to their institution was the acknowledged fact that the institution, and not the discipline, provided the "jobs" and other resources that make scholarship possible.

What Massy and his colleagues did not find, even among the most collegial departments, was a sustained commitment to improving the services provided to their primary student constituencies. While most departments regularly distributed course evaluations (often dismissed as "smile surveys"), and a few conducted peer evaluations of teaching (principally of the courses taught by untenured faculty), none was found to practice the kind of self-scrutiny or quality control that characterizes other segments of the service sector. Few departments, even among the very best in the study, systematically sought the feedback of all the constituencies they served—and none could be said to understand that, regardless of individual performance, the group succeeded or failed as a whole.

In the end, Massy and his colleagues came to describe the atmosphere of most departments as one of "hollowed collegiality"—an unspoken pact to maintain a friendly disposition in daily encounters, coupled with a reluctance to discuss substantive matters that would require a frank airing of disagreements or a change of the status quo:

> These vestiges of collegiality serve faculty convenience but dodge fundamental questions of task. This is especially the case, and is regrettable, with respect to student learning: collegiality remains thwarted with regard to faculty engagement with issues of curricular structure, pedagogical alternatives, and student assessment.
>
> We believe these vestiges of collegiality are superficial or "hollowed." And it is this hollowed collegiality that stands in the way

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of improved departmental functioning and breakthroughs in student learning. Ironically, it can also stand in the way of a more satisfying professional life for a department's members.

We seek the renewal of the department as a vital counter to the fragmentation that has taken hold of the academic enterprise. If, as we argue, a declining sense of shared purposes and goals has helped bring about the fragmentation within colleges and universities, then what colleges and universities require are organizational arrangements that can command the loyalties as well as the shared interests of otherwise disparate faculty.

Hence we turn to the academic department, precisely because it, more than any other unit within the academy, has the power to organize and make accessible what is known, and what is to be taught by whom. The effective department in our conception is a double agent, working equally in the cause of its discipline and its institution, linking its membership to both venues. It is the department that provides the foundation to support both disciplinary study and interdisciplinary efforts that span complex issues and problems. For most faculty, it is an academic home, a place of identification, support, and camaraderie. No less, we believe, it is the academic department that provides to those who seek change a place from which to launch the process of renewal.

First Definitions

How ought that recasting and revitalization—even restructuring—of the academic department best proceed? Drawing on the experiences of the Pew Higher Education Roundtable, as well as the work of AAHE, we would counsel beginning with a simple exercise in collective definition. In our view, an effective department is one that ensures that its members remain active scholars, expert in their primary fields and open to inter- and cross-disciplinary opportunities. It holds its members accountable for the quality of learning achieved both by majors and by students seeking general knowledge in the subject of the department's teaching. It serves as an arena for faculty to talk regularly about how, what, and why they teach—to learn from each other as well as from their students what success will mean in an increasingly competitive marketplace for ideas, jobs, and other opportunities. Finally, the effective department functions as a community of scholars having diverse experience, talent, and ambition, willing to assign different responsibilities to individual members at different stages of their professional careers.

We would expect this exercise in definition to yield a discussion of roles, responsibilities, and internal constraints—a discussion that begins with a frank consideration of the department's responsibility for the curriculum, its capacity for quality control, and its dependency on the chair for sustained energy and focus.

By any reckoning, teaching and learning are the first domains of departmental responsibility. As such, they should be central and repeated subjects of departmental discussion and of individual faculty reflection, though in fact they are frequently relegated to the closet of matters unspoken and unaddressed. Too often, faculty have begun their careers having received minimal practice in teaching and virtually no preparation for the kinds of students they encounter in the institutions where they are appointed to teach. Young faculty often receive only a dim sense of the department's goals in teaching, and there are generally few occasions for establishing common ground and sharing experiences with colleagues.

Few departments, even among the very best in the study, systematically sought the feedback of all the constituencies they served—and none could be said to understand that, regardless of individual performance, the group succeeded or failed as a whole.

Many departments simply provide no arena for faculty at any stage of their careers to discuss the challenges of teaching well. Hierarchical structure can easily impede a frank exchange between junior and senior faculty on this subject. As if to account for the silence, the prevailing belief is often that mastery of a discipline itself confers on faculty the ability to teach. It is not uncommon,

then, for faculty to know little about the life of their students beyond the classroom—how they study or learn, how much they work in school and out, what kinds of aspirations or uncertainties they bring to the classroom. If asked how today's students differ from those of 20 or 30 years ago, most faculty will complain that the attention spans of today's learners have been shortened by television, that students read little, talk rather than converse, and have little interest in knowledge or learning for its own sake.

If one presses further and asks when the department or the faculty as a whole last assessed its students, redesigned its curriculum, or changed the method of teaching, the answers grow fewer and less certain. What come to mind are the efforts of individual faculty, the pilot programs introduced and later abandoned, and the launching of broad curricular reviews which ordinarily settled for marginal changes in requirements or the introduction of a new general education sequence. What is noted as well is that the changes in teaching that have occurred have usually focused on the content and not on the role of the teacher in facilitating learning; while some do apply electronic technology to promising ends, the basic paradigm of teaching and learning for the most part has not changed.

By any reckoning, teaching and learning are the first domains of departmental responsibility. As such, they should be central and repeated subjects of departmental discussion and of individual faculty reflection.

Three premises underlie these often disconnected conversations about students and curriculum, each attesting to the educational inertia often vested in undergraduate instruction:

- As a readily definable framework for conveying knowledge and expertise, the course remains the natural unit of instruction. Courses afford faculty the greatest sense of ownership and comfort, all but guaranteeing the right of faculty members to teach both how and what they want.
- Faculty are principally scholars and experts—what others would describe as educational authorities. They are more likely to see their students as apprentices or interns than as customers or consumers. Faculty are leery of sharing control of the classroom with students, who may possess a firm sense of what they *want*, but as yet little sense of what they *need* to know.
- Most faculty conceive of teaching as something they do by themselves—again, it is "my work," "my courses," "my majors." They are experts in their own fields working along side—but only occasionally with—colleagues who are experts in their respective specialties. In most institutions, it is only students who know how the faculty as a whole teaches, how individual teaching styles differ, or how one faculty member might profitably learn from another.

Changing the Premises

The renewal of undergraduate education depends on the recasting of each of these premises. Departments must consist of faculty who know how their colleagues teach, who are regular visitors to each other's classes, who share course syllabi, who collaborate in the design of core courses in the major, and who are partners in exploring new ways to promote student learning. In their role as teachers, faculty must come to exchange more willingly the role of lecturer-on-high for that of mentor and guide.

The changes in teaching that have occurred have usually focused on the content and not on the role of the teacher in facilitating learning; while some do apply electronic technology to promising ends, the basic paradigm of teaching and learning for the most part has not changed.

Departments must lead the way in developing more "student-centered" curricula—learning expe-

riences designed to provide students with the skills and knowledge they need to succeed, with the recognition that not all students learn in the same way as their peers or their instructors. For most departments, to focus on the needs of today's students—including the growing proportion of those who are not of traditional age—will require an understanding that the path to educational renewal leads inexorably to a reconsideration of the timing and pace of undergraduate instruction. If charged with the designing of instructional programs to achieve the learning outcomes they seek, we frankly doubt that most faculty, students, or administrators would reinvent the semester or the idea of the course that meets periodically for an hour or two at a time. In themselves, these components of an educational process from an earlier era do not provide the sort of experiences likely to maximize student learning.

What we seek, then, are faculty conversations within and across departments that make teaching and learning the principal topic of discourse, and that thereby recast the basic premises that now organize the delivery of undergraduate instruction. Such conversations will have to become an integral part of each department's agenda. Department members who share curricular responsibilities will have to come together regularly to talk about how their students learn and how they, as faculty within the department, can best promote that process.

Some natural questions for beginning such discussions concern the quality and coherence of the department's major: Is it designed from a well articulated sense of the knowledge and skills students should master by the time of graduation? Has it considered the range of applications other than graduate study to which those skills and knowledge can be applied? Does it exhibit a pattern of integration and steady development between courses offered in the introductory, middle, and capstone phases of study? Does it provide students with a perspective on both the methods of the given discipline and the potential for interdisciplinary approaches to complex problems and issues?

None of these conversations will be easy. With the advance of academic privatization, teaching too often has become an activity enshrouded in silence to be carried out behind closed doors. Some will argue therefore that the only way to achieve meaningful reform is to conduct immediate conversations about teaching and learning on an institution-wide scale, involving not just faculty but students and staff as well. Certainly these kinds of institutional conversations are necessary, as the Pew Campus Roundtables have shown. Ultimately, though, the sense of renewal within an institution necessarily proceeds from explicit faculty engagement. For this reason, it is the department—as the faculty unit with initial and often final responsibility for the curriculum—that is most likely to provide an arena for purposeful change.

Altered States

For renewal to succeed, however, the department must take steps to become the agent of its institution as well as its discipline. The conversations on which this renewal depends may prove to be messy, fractious, at times mean-spirited and defensive, but also energizing and liberating. Too long delayed, they will be difficult to start, but once commenced, such conversations will take on lives of their own, yielding in the process an academic department that more readily defines itself in terms of the perspectives and hence responsibilities its members share. To the extent that they can be made an explicit element of institutional strategy, four changes can substantially increase the probability of success.

1. Institutions need to foster a greater commitment to teamwork. Departments ought to be held responsible and rewarded for the quality of learning their students achieve. As units that are expected to work as teams, departments need to be pushed to assign different roles to members at different points in their careers. A growing number of institutions are in fact working to make the department the unit for reward and punishment, linking individual faculty raises as well as discretionary departmental funds to the collective achievements of the department in both teaching and research. Several institutions report that the new incentives are in fact yielding the desired shift from "my work" to "our work."

2. Faculty need to make effective teaching a subject of collective dialogue and inquiry. Despite the near absence of knowledge about or training in successful instruction, most faculty are not bad

teachers. They are diligent, they care about their students, and, over time, they have learned what they do best and how to avoid what they do worst. What too many faculty lack, however, is a broader frame of reference for gauging their own teaching and setting goals for improvement. Lee Shulman has argued that effective teaching needs to be conceived as a public activity that takes place within a community of interests; as with research, the most appropriate terms for evaluating teaching are defined by the methods and data of a discipline. Within a given institution, it is the department that embodies the most immediate and appropriate community of interest that can help faculty to improve their teaching. The irony is that, in the absence of departmental discussion, too often faculty do not know how good they really are.

Departments ought to be held responsible and rewarded for the quality of learning their students achieve.

The work both of Ernest Boyer and of K. Patricia Cross suggests that, in large measure, the answer lies in making teaching and the classroom itself the subjects of scholarly dialogue and inquiry. What distinguishes most scholars is the relentlessness with which they pursue the objects of their curiosity—testing, challenging, asking new kinds of questions, exhibiting a willingness to consider the impossible as well as the unlikely. To the extent that teaching and learning become a focus of collective inquiry, the resulting sense of shared commitment ought to enable individual faculty to visit one another's classes, to make effective teaching a regular subject of departmental discourse, and to make curricular experimentation a focus of departmental planning.

Part of the challenge facing departments is to formulate goals in a language that compels the attention of individual faculty and enables them to build a community of interest. "How do we improve teaching?" is not a question likely to stimulate faculty imagination and energy. "How can we better prepare our students for the changing worlds of work and citizenship?" is a question that does.

3. Institutions need to make a greater commitment to quality control—and to rewarding departments that attain collective goals. Most faculty, and hence most departments, have been reluctant to engage in the kind of self-scrutiny that has become the hallmark of successful service enterprises. Those providers want to know how their customers use as well as value the services they receive. The results of such inquiries give rise to something more than exhortations to "do better next time"; they become the basis for rethinking both the service and the delivery system. An organization that focuses on its customers and consumers will tailor its services to fit their needs; it monitors continually its success in fulfilling service goals, and it makes adjustments to its operations as appropriate over time.

What quality control requires first is a clear statement of outcomes—in this case, the learning that the educational experience is expected to produce. Measurement follows definition, whether it be the mastery of a subject, competency in a skill, or the capacity to think critically and solve problems. In effect, the quality movement challenges the academy to define in practical terms what it seeks to achieve—what students and the public can expect to receive in exchange for their support of the institution itself. Some of the responsibility for quality rests finally with students themselves as the beneficiaries who must believe in and take responsibility for their own educations.

More than any other figure within the department, it is the chair who must convene those faculty conversations that, precisely because they raise tough questions, evoke meaningful answers defining the nature of the community's work.

To hold departments accountable for the quality of the learning experiences they provide, colleges and universities must conduct reasonable assessments matching intended outcomes against demonstrated student attainments. Departments

seeking to improve their performance, whether as a matter of pride or to qualify for the incentives promised for enhanced quality, need the same assessment tools to monitor and improve their own level of performance, as well as to test new programs and initiatives.

Finally, the institution must be prepared to reward those departments that establish meaningful goals and make demonstrable progress in achieving them. No department can be expected to alter its behavior from exhortations alone; to change the prevailing culture requires tangible rewards. What if the annual budget for each department were to be considered essentially as a "grant proposal," subject to review and refunding every year? The economic incentive thus created would be a powerful stimulus to enhanced teamwork and a sense of collective responsibility for outcomes within a department.

4. The department must have the leadership of a purposeful chair. The fourth required condition for departmental renewal is the presence of strong and decisive leadership, along with a spirit of teamwork and shared endeavor among a department's membership. A chair must embody the spirit of camaraderie and collegial exchange that makes possible the achievement of common goals within a department. Unlike the manager of a for-profit enterprise, an academic chair is one who "serves" the department and the institution. Few take up the reins of departmental leadership in pursuit of professional advancement. More than in other settings, the chair depends on the support of other, particularly senior members of the department, to bring about collective goals.

The power of the chair ought to derive from the ability to speak *to* as well as *for* the department. For this reason, whoever leads a department must be widely respected by other members as a scholar, teacher, and leader. The ideal relationship of chair to department is that of team captain to players, with the understanding that another player will inherit that role in the future. The leadership role should not distance a chair from faculty colleagues or cause individual faculty to think they can be exempt from larger institutional issues. Entrusted by its members, a chair ought to have a major voice in establishing the department's agenda, in articulating what performance standards are acceptable, in matching individual faculty with specific assignments, and—where the practice can be supported—in recommending salary increases and other forms of reward.

There is nothing in the career of most faculty members that explicitly prepares them for the tasks of assuming the chair. The work of Ann Lucas underscores the need for new department chairs to receive training in the skills necessary to fulfill the responsibilities of leadership: building teams, both among department members and with other department chairs; creating a supportive communication climate; empowering faculty; making quality teaching an ongoing faculty development activity; securing faculty commitment to departmental goals; encouraging faculty to engage in scholarship; and managing conflict. Given the time required to master such skills, we believe the terms of office for effective chairs should be extended to match those of deans, who ordinarily do not face collegial reviews until after they have been in office for five or six years. What the individual members of the department must come to appreciate is that their own futures depend on the strengths and successes of their chair. They ought to want to curtail those who fail and stand by those whose leadership brings demonstrated rewards.

No institution exists in a vacuum; every dean, provost, and president knows that to voice the need for faculty to "give back" more of their energies to the institution is to tempt many accomplished faculty members to send out their vitae.

Weak chairs are principally concerned with preserving the department's prerogatives, making certain that it participates sufficiently in institutional objectives to appease the dean while shielding as many faculty as possible from excessive dosages of "accountability" and other "administrative trivia." Strong chairs are agents for change. A very good chair can be said to possess both vertical

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or "outside" vision of the discipline and horizontal or "inside" vision of the institution. To be effective, a chair must establish the tone and context for department discussions of the curriculum, making certain that teaching and learning are principal subjects of discourse and that teaching becomes more of a shared, even a public activity within the department and the institution. More than any other figure within the department, it is the chair who must convene those faculty conversations that, precisely because they raise tough questions, evoke meaningful answers defining the nature of the community's work.

Checklists for Change

We understand well that there is no single way of bringing about the changes in institutional culture and practice that we have described. Every institution is different, every particular context provides its own pitfalls as well as opportunities. The difficulty of bringing about real reform is further compounded by the fact that no institution exists in a vacuum; every dean, provost, and president knows that to voice the need for faculty to "give back" more of their energies to the institution is to tempt many accomplished faculty members to send out their vitae.

Still, the paths to reform are not without common markers. Disciplinary associations—mathematics is a prime example—are providing national contexts for their affiliated departments to consider the range of curricular changes we have been urging. Three initiatives launched by AAHE—the Forum on Faculty Roles and Rewards, the New Pathways Project, and the Peer Review of Teaching Project—have made faculty across the span of institutions more broadly aware of both the requirements and advantages of spawning a more collaborative culture, of honoring new forms of scholarly excellence, and of developing a greater sense of shared accountability. Jon Wergin's recent monograph for AAHE describes encouraging signs of progress toward a more collaborative culture at several institutions. The Campus Roundtables that nearly 100 institutions have now convened in partnership with the Pew Higher Education Roundtable have helped institutions to understand that they are not alone in seeking renewal, that their issues and dilemmas are faced by others, and that the solutions often involve institutions working together.

We have argued in the past that traveling this path to reform requires two principal commitments:

- to a process of educational renewal that is both student- and learning-centered;
- to a revitalized conception of academic work as a set of shared responsibilities.

To these, we now add a third commitment:

- to an organizational strategy that renews the academic department, making it a principal agent for change both within the institution and within the academic discipline.

We believe the process of making the department a change agent within an institution begins with the asking of questions—questions addressed to presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs, and individual faculty.

Questions for presidents, provosts, and deans:

- What steps could encourage the campus in general and the faculty in particular to undertake, as a prelude to reform, a fundamental reconsideration of the undergraduate learning experience?
- How might the institution reward those departments that function as effective communities of interest dedicated to improved student learning?
- What are the measures of collective accountability on which such a reward system must ultimately depend?

Questions for department chairs:

- How might a collective conversation be convened within the department for defining common purposes and shared responsibilities?
- What would be an effective department strategy for gauging the quality of students' learning experiences within the department?
- How does this department's teaching compare both in quality and effectiveness with that of other departments across campus—and with that of departments in the same academic discipline at similar institutions?

Questions for individual faculty:

- How can I help to dispel the sense of fear and distrust that often prevents members of my department from working effectively together to achieve departmental goals?
- What steps could I and my colleagues take to create an environment that makes teaching and learning the subjects of continuing discussion and inquiry within the department?
- How can I provide the chair with the kind of support necessary as the department faces difficult questions concerning the curriculum and the department's responsibility to the institution? How might I help to foster an environment that enables members to set aside rank and status in deciding matters of importance to the department?

* * * * *

In this process, we see the academic department as a double agent: both a force for institutional change and a link to the scholarly world of disciplinary knowledge and practice; it is both a lead actor in and the stage for the drama of institutional renewal and reform. More than any other player, it is the department that holds the key to the process of change: because it is the natural rallying point for faculty; because it literally owns the curriculum its members teach; and, in the final analysis, because it has the greatest power to end the fragmentation that has come to characterize the academic enterprise.

The institution that is prepared to rethink its approach to teaching and learning, develop measures of accountability, and reward or withhold favor from departments for collective performance is an institution that is prepared to renew its sense of itself as a community working toward the achievement of shared goals. By the same token, the department whose members can work concertedly to improve teaching and learning is one with the capacity to renew its traditional framework, bringing to life an aspect of its identity that too often has gone unacknowledged.

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